1:Arensberg & Kimball E-5 (1932-1934) 1940
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
County Clare

and consists ordinarily of a kitchen, occupying the greater part of the rectangle, and a second room, behind the hearth and chimney which occupy most of one end of the kitchen. There are sometimes one or two bedrooms at the opposite end of the kitchen, in addition. In East Clare this type of house is common, but there is also a squarer type which may have a second story.

The tiny peasant cabins dating from the last century are of the West Clare type; they were and are single-gabled, rectangular blocks of one or two rooms, with steep, thatched roofs and a single half-door on each side. The half-doors open directly out of the kitchen, the one to the windward kept closed. The modern stone cottages erected by the governmental agencies and patterned after those built first by the Congested Districts Board (1893–1923) are slated and weatherproofed. Except for additional four rooms, they represent the same pattern. It is impossible to give a statistical statement of the occurrence of this type of house or to correlate its numbers with those of the small farm families, but housing records show that 36 per cent of Clare's population live in three-room dwellings, 24 per cent in four-room dwellings, and 12 per cent in two-room dwellings, which seems to point to a fairly close correspondence between the proportion of small farm population to total population.

In the small farmer's house of this type, the kitchen is the seat of family life. In it are the hearth, at which cooking is done, the table around which the family – first the adult males, then the women and children – eat, the kitchen utensils, and the religious shrine of the "Blessed Lamp" and the Sacred Heart picture before which the family prays the "Family Rosary" at night. Here also is the "dresser" found in nearly every small farmer's house, a sideboard filled with fancy china and porcelain used only for family festivals and to give to marrying relatives. The family will part

592 with this china only under dire necessity. In many districts
352 the year's supply of home-cured bacon still hangs from the
353 rafters.

343 From the kitchen to the haggard, the farmyards, and cow sheds is but a step through one of the half-doors. There are found the sheds and outhouses where all the livestock, agricultural implements, carts, are kept and the fuel supply and the hayrick stand.

513 Sleeping arrangements reflect the age grading and the sexual arrangements within the family. Children generally
561 occupy the "loft," a boarded attic covering from a quarter
562 to a half of the space under the peak of the roof. If space is restricted, they may also occupy the "settlebed" in the kitchen, or they may be divided up between the two on the basis of sex. Older children and the married couple will occupy the bedrooms.

353 The room, however, which we described as occupying
512 the part of the rectangle behind the hearth in the kitchen is of especial interest. It may or may not be used as a bedroom. It is generally so used only when space is limited. But in this room all the objects of sentimental value (except the shrine and the dresser in the kitchen) are always kept: the religious pictures, the ceremonial objects brought in by the bride at marriage, and the bric-a-brac associated with the past members of the household. Where there is only one couple in the house, this room is reserved as a sort of parlor into which none but distinguished visitors are admitted.
[523] The family heirlooms are there, and, lining the walls along with religious pictures, there appear the photographs of the members of the family, especially the familiar daguerreotypes of the last century. Whatever "fine" pieces of furniture
[352] there may be, such as highboys, cabinets, brass candlesticks, are kept there, as are all the religious objects used when mass is celebrated in the house. All these objects are inalienable
[425] in the sense that the family parts with them only when it
[428] Must, They descend from Father to Son with the house & the farm on which it stands.

2: Campbell B, E-5 (1934-1935) 1937 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
County Galway

341 called the first type *the central-chimney house*, because the chimney will be erected over the fire-place somewhere about the middle of the roof, (fig. 1 and pl. XLI: 1, 2, 3 ; the second *the gable chimney house* because here the chimney will be close to the gable often being built as a part of the stone-built gable (fig. 2 and pl. XLI: 2). The outside chimney then not seldom forms a pronounced gabletop or gable-finial.

The Central-chimney house.

342 Some of the most primitive houses I found in Ireland belong to the central chimney house type. To illustrate I choose a house from Spiddle, Co. Galway (fig. 3 and pl. XLI: 1). The house is said to have been built before 1839 and to have withstood the "big wind" of that year. How old it actually is I had no means of discovering. The walls are of stone with the mortar put on afterwards on the inside and outside, but not used in the actual construction of the walls. Some outhouses belonging to this farm are all of dry wall construction. The roof of straw rests on couples of beams, supported on the inner edge of the walls, so that the thatch does not quite reach as far as the outside edge of the wall, but leaves a narrow space uncovered.
[171] This is an archaic feature found now in very old buildings in Ireland, as always in the black houses of Scotland.

The house is built on a slope, so that the fireplace end of the house lies higher than the entrance door. There is only one room, but a low partition wall at the back of the fire cuts off a section which is used as a bedroom.
[352] In the lower end of the house a dresser is placed so that it together with a small table cuts off another section that nowadays is also used as a bedroom. Some stools, a cradle and a churn are the other contents. There are two doors opposite of each other, both provided with half-doors. The fireplace consists of some flat stones on the floor. Over the fireplace there is a
[354] wattled chimney resting on two beams, supported by a cross beam. The chimney is adapted to a hole in the thatched roof, so there is no outside chimney. On one side of the house, the sheltered side, there are two windows.

About other houses of the same kind, I have heard from the inhabitants
[231] that in olden times the lower end of the house was used for the cattle. In late times the cattle have been removed to an outhouse and this part of the house has been adopted as a living room.

342 171 The division of the house into three sections, which is characteristic of the central-chimney house type, is quite clear in the Scottish houses, namely the black houses, the bedroom being at the upper end of the house behind the

[Text continues top of P.211]

2: Campbell B, E-5 (1934-1935) 1937 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
County Galway

342 fire, and the byre at the lower end of the house. In the Welsh long-house
171 the hearth generally seems to face the living room and bedroom part of the house, and cuts these sections from the byre part. The two doors, opposite to each other, very typical of the Irish house (see p. 217), are also found in the Welsh long-houses, but here the space between the two doors has a more pronounced feeding-walk character, than we find common in Ireland, at least to-day when the cattle are generally removed from the dwelling house. For the three sections of some South Scandinavian houses see p. 222.

The gable-chimney house.

342 In various parts of Ireland I have found numbers of primitive houses with stone-built gables. These houses are always rectangular in form, never oval. Externally the type varies greatly depending mostly on the prevailing wind. On the coast, in very windy districts, the roof will not be built very high, but in more sheltered parts, it will be more lofty.

The gable finial, the gable top often consitutes a very characteristic feature of this house-type, pl. XLII: 2. Only where the low roof is used, the gable top is not especially accentuated. The outside chimney constitutes the gable
[341] top of the chimney-gable. On the opposite gable the gable-finial may be formed in a corresponding way, as a chimneyshaft without any flue. The chimney-shafts at the gables form perhaps the single example in the Irish peasant house of intentional architecture conforming with a wide-spread custom in Western Europe. As regards the serrated gable-ends see p. 226.

342 In small dwellings of this type there is only one room, the fireplace is si-
354 tuated against one gable-wall. The most convenient place for the beds is be-
352 side the fire, and at least one bed is to be found here. This is a very original feature of this house-type which is confirmed by Scottish material, old Irish descriptions, and even drawings. In the middle-west and north of Ireland, the bed is built in a projection outwards, *cailleach*, or at least in a niche in the side wall close to the fireplace, pl. XLII: 2, as in the Scottish *tig dubh*.

342 As in the central-chimney house, there are sometimes two doors opposite each other, but even a single door is common in small old houses.

Windows have come at a later period here also. In old-fashioned houses there is generally only one window, sometimes none at all.

342 At the lower end of the house, there was in more remote times place for
231 domestic animals. The division of the room by means of the dresser may have been adopted at an early stage, the dresser being especially suitable as

2: Campbell B, E-5 (1934-1935) 1937 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
County Wicklow

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[352]

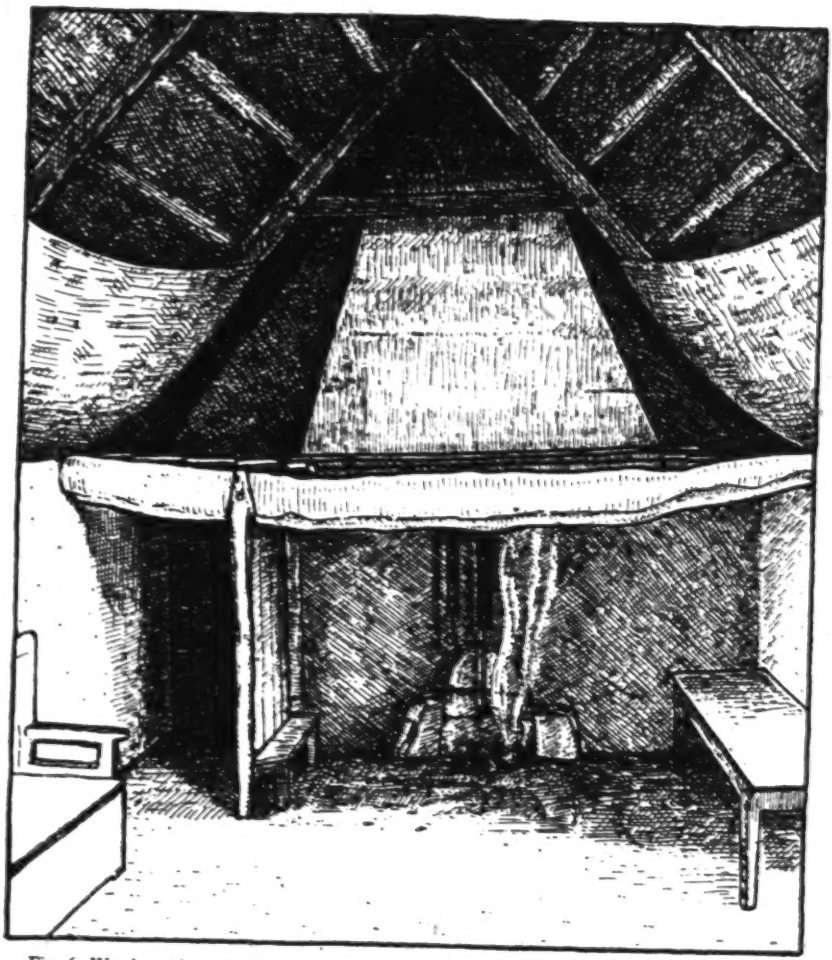

Fig. 6. Wooden side-wall of the fireplace. The kitchen corner. Kyle, Ballinglen, Co. Wicklow.

the "shelter door" into consideration, the whole kitchen being of importance with regard to the fire.

The basket chimney, *síneán*, is plastered with clay inside and outside to resist sparks from the fire. A plaster mixture of clay and calfmanure is said to be very useful. The older chimneys were straight i. e. on looking up from the fireplace the sky was visible above. In later ones the flue, *poll an deataigh*,

[237]

2: Campbell B, E-5 (1934-1935) 1937 ER6 Rural Irish ER6

342 354 is bent from side to side to create more draught. The chimney narrowed gradually upwards until the basket, *cis*, on top was reached. In old houses the chimney was not always capped by the basket-like contraption on the outside, for instance not in coastal districts in the North, pl. XLV: 2. The external chimney however is a noteworthy detail. It was now and then of woven rods of twig or willow and it was thatched in some parts of Ireland, pl. XLVII: 1. In other old houses pieces of board were placed on edge in square formation.

The external chimney is sometimes lacking even if there is an inside chimney. In Donegal in places exposed to the wind, I have seen this even in houses with a stonebuilt chimney.

The basket or wooden chimney is supported by two wooden beams resting on the side walls, sometimes however projecting from the gable wall, pl. XLVII: 3. In a later stage there are two pillar walls or hobwalls carrying the basket chimney.

Across the chimney (inside) halfway up or more, a stick of cut tree-branch projects across the chimney. This stick is supporting the chimneyrack or pot-rack, hanger, *drol*, which is an iron bar and hangs down to the fire-level. Another way of hanging pots over the fire is to use the crane, *croch*, a hooked bar of wood (in older times) or iron. Usually the hangers and the crane are combined and in fact there are many hangers hanging at the same time from the crane. Now and then a chain is used as a hanger.

[352] At the side of the fireplace there is a stool, *stól*, or a number of stools, often varying a little in size, but usually very low. Primitive is the block of wood, *bloc*, a section of a tree, used as a stool. This I have seen in chimney-corners in Co. Kerry. There the round stool of coiled hay-ropes, *suidhistín*, also will be found.

The hob or protection wall behind the fire can develop in such a way that it incorporates the two stools at both sides of the fire, so that there will be two stone-built seats.

Also the pier of the fireplace will be built by pilasters on both sides forming a stonebreast, *piléar an teinteáin*, on which the wattled or wooden chimney rests.

[352] In the pier, as well as in the stone wall behind the fireplace, in the hob, and underneath the stone-seats, there are small closets or holes used to keep utensils. In Donegal, I have seen a hole in the wall at each side of the fire, the one hole for the woman's snuffbox and knitting, the other exclusively for the man's pipe.

In later times the chimney is often built of stone and when at last the pier

2: Campbell B, E-5 (1934-1935) 1937 ER6 Rural Irish ER6

or breast, the seats, and the chimney are built of stone, and joined together, the common modern type of Irish fireplace emerges. It can however take on a slightly different form in different parts of Ireland, for instance in Donegal one finds a carved breast and in Southern Ireland it stands straight up at right angles to the floor.

Only the hearth itself has still another stage to pass through in some parts of Ireland. The hearth will be built so that the fire rests in a grate, in late times much elevated and supplied with iron bars. Below is a place for the ashes. This iron grate owes its origin to the fact that in different parts of Ireland, other fuel such as coal was substituted for turf, pl. XLVIII: 1.

To the coal fireplace often belongs the bellows which can be made in different ways such as the hand bellows and the wheelbellows. These iron grates and bellows can be found in such forms in Welsh and English houses.

The hearth from the earliest times forms the centre of family activity in Ireland. Here is the rallying point of the people. The fireplace has attracted to itself the seating places of the house, and in earlier times even the sleeping places. The place of honour is the corner seat near the fire, where the guests are invited to sit down. The stone-built seats or the small wooden stools placed at the side of the fire in primitive Irish dwellings are probably the predecessors of the comfortable armchairs found at every West European fireplace, in palace or cottage, where the same tradition of social activity is attached to the fire seats. From the many folk-beliefs connected with the fire and the fireplace, I only notice that in the South of Ireland, on All Hallow Eve, the fire is not allowed to go out and food is placed on the floor for the dead people who are expected to visit the house. This custom seems to indicate that in ancient times the places for eating were in front of the fireplace. In Scandinavia the food for the dead people is placed on the table.

The Cailleach.

From the northern coast of Donegal to Galway bay, but not south of it, I have found the projection outwards with the bed, *cailleach*. The outshot with the *cailleach* is ordinarily put at one side of the fireplace. In a district between Tuam, Co. Galway, and Tubercurry, Co. Sligo, I have found a richly developed *cailleach* tradition. In many townlands nearly every house is fitted with a *cailleach*, and it is not un-common to find a *cailleach* beside the fireplace in the kitchen, continued by a *cailleach* put to the bedroom behind the fireplace. This *cailleach* connects the houses of central and northern Ireland with the primitive houses of Scotland, *both* and *tigh dubh*, where the in-

2: Campbell B,E-5 (1934-1935) 1937 ER6 Rural Irish ER6

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171 built bed in the hall beside the fireplace has been common. But this custom of bed is also known over a wider area along the North Sea. As to the outshot it is to be remarked that it must be compared with the outshots of English and Northwest European houses. Where the outshot tradition is natural to the house-types, the outshots are used for purposes and not only for beds.

In Donegal I have found *cailleachs* closed with wooden doors, similar to the built in beds of North-West Europe. The *cailleach* is cut off by curtains.

It has been mentioned that the dresser at an early stage of development has formed part of the partition. This and other facts (the dresser has generally a fixed traditional place, different in different parts of Ireland) seems to indicate that the dresser belongs — as in Scandinavia and West-European countries — to a rather old set of furniture.

The table however seems not to have any prominent place in the old-fashioned houses at least in Western and Northern Ireland. It is always put along a wall in primitive houses, and one can never sit round it. It never attracted the social activities of the house, and there are no ceremonies connected with the places at the table, as in countries where the table is the predominating social and family-centre. In this respect the table in Ireland has never supplanted the fireplace. There are no references, as far as I am told in the early tales to people feasting at the table. I think that the table [184] does not belong to the original set of furniture. In many fishermen's dwellings in North-West of Donegal it is still missing. The people sit in front [264] of the fireplace round the shallow-basket, *ciseog*, when eating, the basket resting upon the knees of the familymembers. This basket will be seen after dinner-time hanging to dry on the south wall of the house, pl. XLVIII: 2. I suppose this is the native and original "table", at least in certain cultural spheres of Western and Northern Ireland.

[113] [1] In a valuable article by Ludwig Mühlhausen, Contributions to the study of the concrete material culture of the Gaoltacht, Cork Arch. Soc. Vls. XXXVIII, p. 67, and XXXIX, p. 41, et sqq., is found a very good description of houses in Dingle Peninsula and Cornamona, Co. Galway. I have not come across any more detailed contribution to the study of the Irish house. From books of travel and novels some information can be picked up. See Béaloideas 1935. p. 57 sqq.

[114] [2] The material here presented has been collected by me during journeys in Ireland in the years 1934 and 1935. For the many facilities afforded me in pursuing my investigations in Ireland I must express my thanks to the Irish Folklore Commission and its Director Mr Séamus O'Duilearga, on whose behalf I undertook these studies. I am also grateful to my Irish friends both scholars and country people who kindly lent me their assistance. Here I can only mention Mr Seán O'Suilleabháin, B. A., and Miss Áine Ní Chróinín, M. A., especially for having supplied the Gaelic terms used by me.

[3] As to the Welsh long-houses the cruck construction seems to be an exception (see Peate p. 452).

[4] Cfr. Sigurd Erixon: Skansens Kulturgeschichtliche Abteilung, Führer. Stockholm 1928, p. 92.

[5] *Pinniúir*, f., a gable, a gable-end; fig. a patron, chief, etc. *pinniúir an tighe*, the house-gable, fig. the "head" of the house. Fr. pignon, Eng. pynum. Dinneen, An Irish-English Dictionary.

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

CHAPTER VIII.

THE INTERIOR OF THE HOUSE: FIRESIDE AND FOOD.

As we step inside an old Irish cottage, over a threshold of stone slabs or a pattern of small cobble-stones, we tread on a hard mud floor in which we may see, towards the hearth, the "pot hole" where the large iron pot rests when it is lifted off the fire. I have noticed similar holes in the mud floor, with the remains of the round-bottomed pottery vessel inside, near the excavated hearths of Irish houses nearly 40 centuries old. In paved kitchens a block of wood set flush with the flags answers the same purpose or there may be an iron pot rest (Fig. 25). The area surrounding the hearth is always paved, and the fire itself, in the old style, is at floor level. We shall be invited to take a seat at the fire, for this is the place of honour given to strangers: the fireside is both the focus of family life and the symbol of hospitality. The seat may be a stone slab built into the fireplace, so that the social tradition is incorporated in the architecture of the hearth, or it may be a roughly made but sturdy chair, bench or "creepie" (Fig. 26). The low stool not only brings one near fire-level, but keeps one's head out of the peat smoke hanging in the open rafters, while its three legs find firm footing on the uneven floor. Other low stools are made of solid turf or wood—a section of a tree-trunk—or again of coiled straw-rope, while chairs are often made with seats of sugán or of rush. Comfortable high-backed chairs fashioned out of straw in the manner of a

Fig. 25.

Fig. 26.

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

352 bee-hive were common in some districts, but in parts of Mayo one rarely sees chairs of any kind. Step or ladder backed chairs with rush or straw seats are widespread: in the north-east chairs with wooden seats and upright-barred backs are [372] perhaps more usual. The turf fire is never allowed to go out: the glowing turves are heaped with ash at night and can be readily blown into a flame in the morning.

342 If the house has kept its brace and wattled chimney we shall be sitting under a canopy which tapers upwards to the smoke hole. The brace is a great beam extending from wall to wall, or resting at one end on a post some 5 feet out from the end-wall: between post and wall there may be a side partition or curtain-wall (Fig. 27) known in the Armagh-Meath area as the jamb-wall or the "hollan."[1] In some districts the front door is placed opposite this wall, but not, I fancy, in really old houses. In that case there may be a small window—the "spy-hole" "entry," or "jamb-window"—in the partition, allowing the sitter at the fireside to keep an eye on the open door. I have seen several houses in Co. Armagh where one has to stoop under the projecting brace to enter the house (Fig. 27). A further development is to hang a door on the brace-post, thus making a kind of internal porch or small hall. The jamb-wall is found from Co. Down to Co. Limerick but I have not seen it in the north-western province of the outshot.

342 The canopy is constructed of wattles or of sugán, plastered
352 with mud and cow-dung and white-washed outside. Canvas or boards are recent substitutes. At the sides of the chimney, above the ends of the brace, are small lofts or storeplaces, and there may be a larger "half-loft" over the other end of the kitchen—a relic of the time when corn and hay were kept here for feeding the animals below. A usual feature, under the stone seat to one side of the fire, is the ash or rubbish pit, another survival from far prehistory; and balancing it on the other side of the fire there may be a warm stone recess for the [231] sitting hen. At the back of the fire is a thick flag—the backstone—or a mass of clay forming the hob, but this is carefully built up of stones or bricks in eastern and southern

[1] This word is also used in N. England and Scotland for the curtain-wall. In Lancashire it is termed the "speer."

[TEXT CONTINUES TOP OF P. 70 -- ANALYST]

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
Armagh

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Co. Armagh. Cottage Hearth with Brace. Derryinver T. L.

Fig. 27. Note wheel-bellows.

Co. Armagh. Cottage Hearth, Jambwall & window. Derrytrasna.

Fig. 28. Note "jamb-window."

[p. 69]

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

342 Ireland, which is the province of the wheel-bellows (Fig. 27)
352 a contrivance which produces a powerful draught under the fire. Another feature of the fireplace is the small keeping-holes (" boles ") in the wall, which may contain the clay pipes or the knitting : they are usually reserved for special purposes and seem to have their peculiar association with either male or female use. The alarm clock is often kept in one of these
[805] recesses—on the south side, I have been told, because that is the side where the sun tells the time—but there are cabins where the rooster is the only time-keeper, his perch being the long pole, or, in the old days, the sugán, which crosses the cabin in front of the fire and which is used in the daytime for drying clothes.

251 Near the fire too is the wooden meal chest or " ark,"
352 where the oatmeal is stored. One of the ancient customs, now almost dead, is the " tramping " of the meal, the children
[857] being periodically placed in the ark, barefooted, to tread it down. Alternatively the meal was stored in a large hogshead immediately behind the chimney, in the " room," where it would be kept dry without taking up the valuable hearth space. Under the brace you may perhaps see a lump of bacon or a dried fish or two, and this is the place where the horse collar is hung in some districts. We shall return to the other fireside gear later in the chapter.

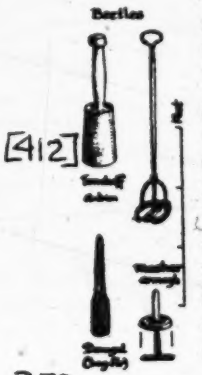
354 In some areas, especially in the north and north-west, that is the province of the gable hearth, the brace and canopy are rarely seen, their place being taken by a stone or brick chimney (Fig. 29). It seems probable that houses of the outshot type, at least, never had the brace, which would be difficult to erect owing to the recessed side-wall. There are
352 many problems which require study in this connexion. Where possible the bed, whether half-recessed in its cailleach or not, lies at one side of the fire : alternatively there may be a large settle—often convertible into a bed—against one of the side walls. This is generally a solid piece of furniture, and I have seen some very attractive examples of bog-oak.

The most noticeable article of furniture in the room is the dresser, which though generally of deal and lacking the fine

[TEXT CONTINUES TOP of P. 72 -- Analyst]

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

352 workmanship of the Welsh oak dressers, is an essential part of the kitchen and, like the keeping-holes mentioned above, has its prototype in the stone shelves of some of our oldest prehistoric dwellings. The dresser belongs, like so many of the other elements we are discussing, to the "Atlantic" province of European folk-culture. It accompanies the open hearth tradition as distinct from the "oven tradition" of central Europe, and may be thought of (compare the absence of the large table mentioned below) as providing storage while taking up a minimum of the valuable floor space in small single-roomed houses. The dresser has its fixed place in the layout of the kitchen, the position varying, however, according to the district, the type of house, disposition of the doors, and so on. In the outshot houses it stands against the side wall alongside the bed, whereas in the central-hearth type it lies 352 across the kitchen opposite the fire and helps to partition off 415 the end room. The bottom of the dresser is open. Here the hen-coops, of straw, wattle or wood, were sometimes kept, but one is more likely to see a collection of iron pots and the crocks, buckets or wooden stave-built vessels (piggins) for holding water or milk. The latter I have seen covered with roughly trimmed stone slabs (Fig. 68), a prehistoric device which has the advantage of coolness and gives protection from the cats. On the dresser are a few bits of "delph" and the tin mugs which have displaced the wooden noggins. Delph, as kitchen-ware is called, has not long since become general in remote parts. Of Mayo in the last century we read that "all their vessels were of wood, most of them cut out of solid timber." These included not only platters, spoons and ladles, but also methers or drinking cups of various sizes. Where the crockery tradition is of old standing, plates, jugs and long rows or nests of bowls "whammeled," that is tumbled on their sides, line the dresser shelves. Here, too, are the beetles of different shapes (Fig. 30) used for pounding or mashing the potatoes. The upright milk churn commonly finds its place alongside the dresser.



352 Fig. 30.

One very rarely sees a table of any antiquity in an Irish kitchen: it is generally of deal and it is placed against one of

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

the side walls so that it is impossible to sit round it. The table is not a centre of social activities and has nothing like the same importance as in an English farmhouse. There are crofters' dwellings in Donegal where no table is used; instead, at meal times, the shallow potato basket or skeehogue (Fig. 31) is taken on the knees of the members of the family as they sit in front of the fire, or an upturned creel may serve instead. Very low oblong tables or trays cut from the solid were formerly used and are occasionally dug up from the bogs. They have holes by which they could be suspended from the wall when not in use, and it may be for convenience of transport during the summer migrations. The potato basket will be seen after meals hanging to dry on the south wall of the house.

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[264]

Fig. 31.

To understand the fireside appliances and methods of cooking certain facts should be borne in mind—the absence of the brick oven, the use of turf, a slow-burning fuel admirable for stewing and for things requiring a steady heat, and the universal preference for "thin-bread," or "bread in cakes," as English observers called it. Once more we have to remind ourselves that parallels to surviving habits can be found 40 centuries back, for pottery baking slabs are known from Neolithic western Europe and of course oatcakes are best baked in this way. Flagstone griddles were apparently common down to a few centuries ago, and a dated specimen of a bakestone is illustrated in Fig. 33. Though oatcakes are now baked on the griddle, it is not long since they were set upright before the fire after drying a little, and turned frequently. The simple "bread-stick" (Fig. 32) or even a lump of turf may serve the purpose, but in the north of Ireland, where bread seems to have been relatively more important than in

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Fig. 32. Co. Galway. Height 1 ft.

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9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

and similarly the cattle were fastened in the byre by ropes of straw, as in Clare, or of horse-hair, as in Kerry. Of the two burden ropes illustrated (Figs. 80, 81) the Donegal example is a two-ply rush rope with an eye made of a peeled stick bent into a loop: the Aran specimen is of grass (Manilla) rope passing through a hole in a wooden runner. Similar blocks of wood serve as a swivel to prevent kinks in tethering ropes, separate lengths of rope passing through each hole.

Reference has been made to the fir-ropes used in securing roofing scraws and thatch. Thin splits of straight-grained bog-fir about four feet long and an inch wide are twisted by hand into hollow cylinders, joined end to end to make a coil of about 50 feet. Two or three of these are twisted together to give the finished product, which combines great strength and elasticity with the capacity to stand up to all weathers. Fir-rope was often stretched across the wooden bed-frame to make a springy mattress. A short "tie" of fir-rope is shown in Fig. 21, p. 63.

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10: Browne D-5 (1893) 1894
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
Inishbofin

homespun, buttoned up the back, and reaching well below the knees, until they reach the age of ten or eleven years. The dyes for the homespuns are obtained from plants growing on the islands; the orange used for stockings being got from a lichen (*Ramalina scopulorum*); black and brown from the purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*); blue from a small cruciferous plant; and red usually from imported madder, but sometimes from water-lily roots. Alum is used as mordant.

5. *Dwellings.*—A house consists of a kitchen, and one or two bedrooms; and it is, as a rule, built of dry stones without any mortar, though this is used afterwards for stopping chinks, and plastering the walls internally. Most of the houses are not whitewashed, with the exception of a belt around the small windows, but lime-washed houses are becoming more common than formerly. The house has two doors, front and back, both opening directly into the kitchen; and the windows are situated only on the front of the house; they are of very small size, and seldom made to open; yet, often, small as they are, they are nearly filled up, so as to leave only from six inches to a foot square of glazed surface. The chimneys and fireplaces are of the usual type found throughout the rural districts of Ireland, except that in some cases the chimney, after rising perpendicularly nearly to the top of the wall, turns outwards and opens as a square hole in the gable. The roof is straw thatch, laid on over "scraws" of grass turf, and held down by a net-work of sougans (straw ropes), to the ends of which heavy stones or long pieces of timber are attached. The gable of the house is stepped, so that the thatch when laid on does not project over the end wall, and is sealed down, to prevent water getting under it at this part, by a plastering of clay.[1] The thatch is put on fresh every year, a new layer being laid over the older ones, until the lowermost layer is thoroughly saturated with smoke, and quite rotten, when the whole is stripped off and used as manure. The floor is of beaten clay in the kitchen, but the bedrooms are sometimes boarded. The most expensive material used in building a house is wood, which is very scarce, and is usually obtained from drift wood, washed up after a storm, in which way large beams often reach the islands. It is owing to this scarcity of material, and the people having to build their own houses, that there are so few outbuildings or cattle-sheds, and that the dwelling-houses are so small. The furniture is scanty, and testifies to the poverty of the people. A few

[1] "Houses thatched in this manner are called on the west coast *tighthe croithte*, i. e. 'shaken houses,' in contrast to the *tighthe fuaighte* 'stitched houses,' in which the thatch is tied on by ropes or cords."—REV. E. O'GROWNEY.

10: Browne D-5 (1893) 1894
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
Inishbofin

352 stools, and a rough table or two, with a dresser containing a scanty assortment of coarse earthenware, a spinning-wheel, and a quilting-frame, constitute the furniture of the kitchen. In one corner is a pile of turf for fuel, on which the fowl roost, and above the couples are stored the dried fish, &c., for the winter's use, and the agricultural and piscatorial implements.

415 The domestic utensils consist of the usual large three-legged pot,
352 slung on a crook over the fire, a griddle, a frying-pan, and, perhaps, a quern, a boran or sieve of sheepskin stretched over a wicker frame, and a couple of skids or shallow, circular wicker baskets. The furniture of the bedroom, or rooms, consists of a couple of tent beds; a few chairs and, perhaps, a small table. There is very rarely a loft
231 to the house. At night the cattle, fowl, and pigs are taken into the kitchen, the pigs being accommodated in a pen beside the fire-place, while the cattle are fastened at the opposite side of the room.

[491] 6. *Transport.*—The roads are good, and extend over a large part of the islands, but are only used for foot traffic and cattle, as there are
492 no wheeled vehicles of any description, and all goods are carried
[482] either in hampers slung on the back, the usual method of taking home potatoes, &c., or in two wicker panniers or cleaves, slung across the back of a pony or donkey, one or other of which is owned by nearly every family. The harness of these animals is home-made, and of primitive design, the panniers, manufactured from osiers grown on the islands, being slung from pegs on a wooden frame, beneath which, to protect the animal's back, is a thick straw mat saddle. Both sexes ride on the horses behind the panniers, and both adopt the same position, a side-ways posture, the men not riding astride.

[243] The method of taking home the harvest is picturesque; the ponies have cloths hung over their faces to prevent their eating the grain, and are then literally clothed with sheaves, which are hung all round them, and piled up so as to give them the appearance of walking straw stacks.

501 For water transport there are a good many boats of various
[505] descriptions, the primary use of which is for fishing; only one, the post-boat, which goes thrice a week to the mainland if the weather permits, being regularly used for transport.

The number and classification of the boats are, it is believed, given correctly below, but it was difficult to get any two accounts to agree.

There are five hookers, seven pookauns,[1] fifteen curraghs, one yawl, and about thirty rowing-boats.

[1] An undecked sailing-boat, cutter rigged.

11: Browne D-5 (1894) 1895
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Kilmore

cemented by "dobe" or tempered clay, or sometimes mortar. It 342
generally consists of two apartments, the kitchen and the "room." The kitchen, which is usually of pretty large size, is used as the living room; it has a floor of beaten clay. This room has one, or perhaps, two windows of small size, and seldom made to open. These are always glazed now-a-days, but in the last century they were covered with oiled sheepskin. The house has two doors, both of which open directly into the kitchen, and are situated about two-thirds of the way from the partition wall of the two apartments.

The end of the kitchen farthest from the fire is used as a pen for [231]
the cattle and pigs. The fowl roost where they can, often on the backs of the cattle.

Above the beams or couples in this part of the kitchen boards are sometimes placed, making a sort of loft, in which fishing and boat tackle, agricultural implements, and other articles are stored.

The fireplace is built against the partition wall between the [354]
kitchen and the room. It consists of a stone hearth backed by a "hob," also of stone, built out slantwise behind it to make the fire draw well. This class of house has no chimney, the smoke escaping through a circular hole in the roof immediately above the hearth.

"The room" is a smaller apartment than the kitchen, (measuring about 12 feet by 10 feet) it has one or two small windows, and the floor is sometimes boarded.

The furniture of the house is poor and scanty, that of the kitchen 352 ●
consisting of a bedstead, rudely made up of drift-wood, two posts being driven into the floor, a longitudinal piece uniting these and two cross-beams at head and foot resting by one end on the posts, and having the other built into the wall. Sometimes it is built up into four-poster shape and has curtains. The bedding is composed either of feather ticks, or, with the poorer people, of straw, covered with coarse sacking. The bedclothes are often very dirty. There is a dresser covered with earthenware plates, cups, and jugs of a poor and cheap description, a table, two or three chairs, and a couple of forms or settles. A long straw rope is usually stretched across the apartment to hang clothes to dry on. Worsted when spun, nets, &c., are hung from the couples.

"The room" contains one or two beds of the sort described, a chair or two, a table (in some cases), and a large chest.

The domestic utensils consist of the usual three-legged pot, a 415
griddle, a gridiron, and sometimes a pot oven, a few staved wooden piggins, a boran or sheepskin sieve, and, in the mountains and islands, a quern, now only used usually for grinding barley for cattle food,

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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PLATE 1

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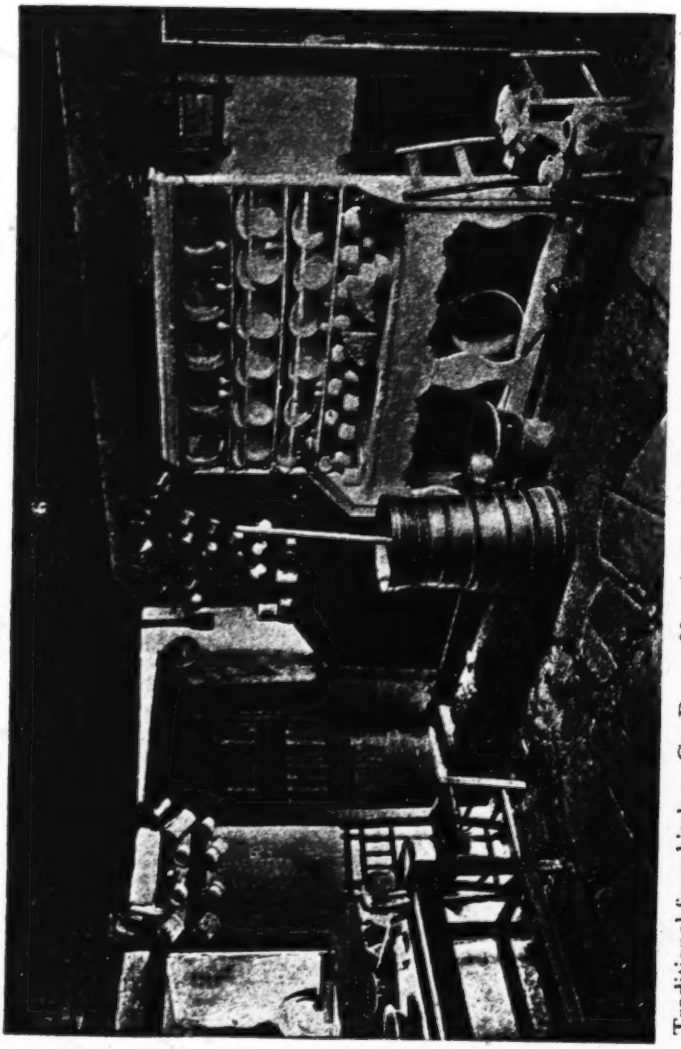

Traditional farm kitchen, Co. Down. Note baking-board on table (*left*) and meal ark to left of dresser, with beetle hanging above.

[facing p. 32]

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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342 kitchen is generally floored with puddled clay which takes a surprisingly well-wearing surface. The housewife will tell you that such a floor raises less dust than one of concrete, and if it tends to wear unevenly this matters little since the cooking pots [415] and some of the furniture which is not built-in has three legs [352] instead of four and will therefore stand firmly on an uneven floor. The rocking chair, despite New England's claim to have invented it, was surely first devised for such a floor. Lime, cowdung or ashes were sometimes added to the floor when it was being prepared, and mud scraped off the road, already well puddled, was considered an excellent floor material.[1] In Armagh, we are told, floors were made by simply digging up the ground and trampling it: 'They sometimes have a dance for that purpose, and many a match comes out of a thing of the sort.'[2] Another method was to keep a flock of sheep moving about the newly spread floor for some hours until it was well puddled. The bottom byre-end of the old-style one-roomed farm house was cobbled, and a flagged walk led from door to door. Devices 231 for tying up the cows were secured to or built into the bottom 353 gable: a variety of stone and wooden fasteners may still be seen in the deserted houses of Slievemore on Achill Island. One writer humorously observes of Co. Galway that the cow had to be tethered lest she should eat the bed-straw, but that pigs and poultry were free to roam.[3] The hens spent the night on a rope or pole hung across the kitchen from eave to eave, and laid their eggs in handsome nesting-baskets of woven straw (Fig. 16). Here we may notice a curious bit of folklore which suggests that hens were carefully looked after for superstitious reasons, as well as for their economic value and for the cockerels' time-keeping. It is said that every night the hens, when they argue among themselves before settling down, are plotting to leave Ireland and fly back to Norway, but in the end they decide to postpone the trip for another day! In Co. Limerick elaborate three-tier wooden hen-coops are sometimes seen in the kitchen, and in Co. Down I have found the sitting

[1] J. Binns, *The Miseries and Beauties of Ireland* (1837), 1, 112.
[2] Ibid., 186.
[3] T. A. Finlay, 'The Economics of Carna', in *The New Ireland Review* (April, 1898).

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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be placed against the gable or, in the central chimney house, against a partition-wall, and one cannot doubt that the general adoption of chimney flues has been the deciding factor. This innovation, slowly adopted from about the sixteenth century onwards, gave rise in time to many regional styles of chimney breast in brick and stone. I suspect that the wattled smoke canopy (Fig. 18) was the native response to the novelty of chimney flues, but I cannot find that it was adopted outside the areas of strong English influence. The substitution of peat for

FIG. 18. Hearth with jamb-wall and wattled smoke-canopy, Co. Armagh. Meal-bin and settle-bed on left.

wood seems to have made little difference to the architecture of the hearth. When coal came to be burnt, however, the fire had to be lifted off the floor, or the hearth fire given a stronger draught by installing a built-in 'fan bellows' which forced air through a tube into the floor of the fire.

The wattled smoke canopy or brace (? breast) is still fairly common in houses with central chimney and fireside partitions, mainly in the south and east. The front of the canopy rests on a

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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laths and wattles (willow, hazel or briar), plastered with a mixture of clay and cowdung or ashes and coated with limewash. In parts of the south hay or straw ropes soaked in mud (putogs) were used, twisted between a frame of horizontal rungs and plastered over with mud or limewash. In Co. Armagh one occasionally sees a heron's wing hung on the brace: it is used for dusting the hearth. The jamb-walls—and internal walls in general—were traditionally constructed of wattle and daub, or of mud or wood. The wattle and daub construction is undoubtedly an old technique which, in the days of plentiful timber, was much more generally used in house-building. Internal partitions carried up to the roof, however, probably followed the adoption of the chimney flue, and if so this innovation must be reckoned as a contribution to privacy as well as to comfort. We note in passing that wattlework found its last traditional use in house construction in the wicker doors of the west, and in the windbreaks of the north, bundles of hazel or birch branches (wassocks) set up on the windward side of the door. The stone-built external porch must be regarded as a relatively novel addition to the traditional house style.

Wooden or stone seats are often built in near the hearth, and the wall behind the fire, protected by a flagstone or a built-up hob, usually has a keeping hole on each side of the fire (Fig. 19). Known as boles in Antrim and coves in Cavan, these may be elaborated in Achill Island, for example, into two- or three-tier wall-dressers whose ancestry lies in the stone house tradition of the mountain country. There is an old belief that the left-hand keeping hole belongs to the woman and the right-hand one to the man of the house. Here you may see in safe keeping, on one side the woman's knitting, on the other the man's clay pipe. Stone dressers were a characteristic feature of the huts at Skara Brae,[1] where also Professor Childe found evidence that the women occupied the left side of the fire and the men the right. In the Hebridean black-houses the left-hand side of the fire was the woman's quarter.[2] Similarly in the old turf houses of the Highlands, 'the women were invariably ranged around the central fire on one side, the men on the

[1] V. G. Childe, *Skara Brae*, 15.
[2] A. Mitchell, *The Past in the Present*, 52.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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FIG. 19. A Donegal hearth, with crane, creepie and bread-iron. Pot and pot-hole on right.

other'.[1] It is interesting to notice that it is the Mongol usage to allot the right side of the yurt to men and the left side to women.[2] We are surely dealing with a very ancient tradition related perhaps to the ordered routine of a pastoral nomadic life. For the Mongols the right and left sides were symbolized respectively by horse and cow. In the humblest Irish farms, which lack sanitary conveniences of any kind, it is customary for the women to use the byre and the men the stable.

[514]

If we now turn to the methods of suspending cooking pots over the fire we shall see how the woman's functions are best carried out on the left side. Besides the convenience of this for a normal right-handed person, there lies behind it the notion that for good luck significant actions involving the food supply—such as ploughing, casting a net or taking a pot off the fire—should follow the direction of the sun's movement in the sky. Thus the crane on which the pots are hung is almost

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[1] Hugh Miller, *My Schools and Schoolmasters* (1857), 96
[2] E. D. Chapple and C. S. Coon, *Anthropology* (1946), 539.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

canopy, sometimes on both, resting on the brace-tree is a wattled shelf or loft which goes under various names such as, in Ulster, skeagh, hurdle or flake. The double loft in the fireside from Co. Cavan illustrated in Fig. 21 is slatted and floored with reed matting, the reeds being bound together with split briar after the manner of a bee-skep. As the term hurdle would imply, these lofts are frequently made of wattle. The heat could rise through them and keep everything above bone-dry, and this was the allocated place for storing various treasured possessions as well as a great deal of 'trumpery'. Here the rushes were dried in the preparation of rush lights, and here the horse-collar was stored when not in use, a reminder that it was made partly or wholly of straw and must be kept dry.

If we are right in supposing that the wattled chimney canopy is a relatively late feature it follows that we cannot regard the chimney loft as an old element in the Irish house. Yet the loft is a traditional fitting for which there seems to be some evidence in early literature, and the need for storage-space must have led to the utilization of part of the roof space. It seems that the loft over the kitchen which nowadays has often become a bedroom in the roof—lit by a small gable window and entered by a steep stairway or even a ladder—began as a half-loft over the bottom end. This survived in Clare Island into the present century and was used to store tools and dried fish. In Fermanagh the half-loft was the hens' roosting-place, serving to protect the cows from droppings and now transferred with them to the byre. By tradition the loft is the sleeping-place of the children, and the man and woman of the house have their bed near the fire, either in the kitchen or in the bedroom behind the chimney flue.

Nowhere is the relationship between the parental bed and the fire better defined than in the traditional house of the north-west, where a small bed-wing—the outshot or *cailleach*—projects out from one of the side-walls at the chimney-end of the kitchen (Fig. 8; Fig. 12, 3). The distribution of this type of house, north of a line from Cushendun in Co. Antrim to south-western Galway, corresponds with many other north-western cultural distributions, and the area is curiously coincident with that of the oldest rocks in the country, the infertile schists and

[text continues on p. 71]

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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quartzites. The bed-wing gives a narrow room additional width where it is most needed, near the fire. It may be that sufficiently long timbers for sizeable rafters were not easily procured in these mountain regions of poor soil. We may be dealing, however, with a feature which has died out in other regions and which has lived on in difficult country. The built-in wall-bed—the half-neuk—is known in the Orkneys, the Faroes and in the Hebridean black-houses and is characteristic of humble societies in other parts of the world. It is possible that in Ireland the wall-bed attests contacts with western Scotland which have repeatedly influenced that part of the country running south-westwards from Co. Antrim following the 'Caledonian grain' to Connacht. In any case the wall-bed appears to be restricted to the extreme north-western fringes of Europe.

The open hearth with all its associations is truly the heart and centre of house and home. The fire is, with her children, the 'care' of the woman of the house. 'A woman can never go to the fire', runs an Irish saying, 'without tampering with it.' The manifold duties of the housewife keep her moving about the hearth, tethered to it for most of the day. Her last duty at night is to 'smoor' it, burying a live turf in the ashes to retain a spark which can be fanned into a blaze next morning. This custom was fortified by the belief that the good folk, the fairies, would be displeased if there were no fire for them through the night. I have sat at fires which, it was claimed, had not been allowed to go out for over a century, or for as far back as family memory could go. It is to the fireside seat that the visitor is invited, for this is the place of honour, and it is around the fire that tales of old time are told. The magic of the open fire, playing upon the fancies of generations who have gathered round it, has engendered a host of beliefs and portents. The fire can give warning of wind and weather, of lucky and unlucky visitors, of marriage and death. Above all, it is a shrine to which ancestral spirits return, a link with the living past.[1]

[1]Since this chapter was written A. T. Lucas has published (in *Arctica*, 11, 16–35) an account of Wattle and Straw Mat Doors in Ireland. See page 65.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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VII

FURNITURE AND FITTINGS

GOOD craftsmanship in wood is so rarely seen in the Irish peasant house that one easily notices a piece of quality furniture. The chances are that it has come out of 'the big house' or, near the coast, from a wrecked ship. Very little oak furniture has survived from the days before the famine, and what there is is likely to be of bog-oak, that is timber dug out of the bogs. The truth seems to be that by the time improved styles of furniture and settled conditions of life had come about, in the second half of the seventeenth century, the native oak-woods had been almost everywhere destroyed, and the common furniture came to be made of bog wood or imported soft woods. The gentry favoured mahogany. Already in the early seventeenth century Ireland was importing pine wood from western Scotland,[1] and during the eighteenth century it was the returning timber ships from Newfoundland and Nova Scotia that initiated Southern Irish emigration to the New World.

No doubt this lack of good quality peasant furniture may be partly attributed to poverty, and to the recurrent famines, of fuel as well as food, which brought despair and led to the burning of furniture. But it also reflects the weak tradition of built-up furniture among a people predominantly pastoral and to some extent nomadic. Certainly degrading poverty and insecure tenancies did not provide the means of support for skilled craftsmen: yet in Wales, where conditions under an

[1] H. G. Graham, *The Social Life of Scotland in the 18th Century*, 4th ed. (1937), 196. On bog timber see A. T. Lucas in *Béaloideas*, 33, 71–134.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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often oppressive landlordism were not dissimilar, a strong tradition of good quality oak furniture was standardized in the eighteenth century and has remained a source of inspiration and pride ever since. The destruction of the native oak woods and the stronger pastoral strain in Ireland were perhaps the dominant factors, but once more we note the exceptional position of the barony of Bargy and Forth, where Gabriel Beranger commented in 1780 on the good-quality, well-kept furniture: 'I have seen in these cabins bureaus of oak so clean that they shone like polished mahogany.'[1]

Sturdiness rather than elegance was the characteristic feature of Irish peasant furniture, and many small household and dairy fittings were hand-cut from the solid or lathe-turned. Yet there was no lack of care taken in the proper arrangement of the furniture in the house. Its disposition was fixed by long custom and varied little throughout the country. One is reminded of the careful division of the limited floor-space of the nomads' tent among the Lapps or Mongols. In fact only by adhering to a strict formula could the family and all their belongings be fitted into a single room which was traditionally also a byre. Invariably the centre of the room, and the whole space in front of the fire, was kept open. This was, for the bulk of the peasant population down to the eighteenth century, the family sleeping-place. According to an account of Mayo in 1799, they slept naked with their feet to the fire, lying on rushes, with a covering of blankets or day-clothes.[2] An earlier account of the Rosses of Donegal, relating to the middle of the eighteenth century, gives us more details: 'All the family lay together in one bed, and, if any visitors came in the evening, they too slept with them; for they set no bounds to their hospitality . . . heath or bent bushes were spread across the floor, to a length sufficient for the number present, and in breadth about six feet; over this litter, the mistress of the house laid part of a long plaid or blanket, on which the others, having stripped off their clothes, lay down as fast as they could; men and women together, all naked: then the mistress having drawn the rest of the blanket over them, lay down herself, naked also. This they call a

[1] Lady Wilde, 'Memoir of Gabriel Beranger', *J.R.S.A.I.* (1876), 132.
[2] In C. Otway, *Sketches in Erris and Tyrawly* (1841), 28, 32.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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Thorough-bed.'[1] The Poor Law Commissioners reported in 1836 that nearly three-quarters of the 10,000 inhabitants of one parish were sleeping on the floor, though they add that this was because the bedsteads had been burnt to boil potatoes. Even after 1850 the custom of sleeping 'in stradogue' as it was called, was not unknown in the west.[2] In Ulster, too, though the master and mistress of the house would have slept in their wall-bed, the young children, where there was only one room, must have slept on the floor. Long custom as well as wretched poverty explains the statement made by Patrick McKye of a Donegal parish in 1837: 'Nor can many of them afford a second bed, but whole families of sons and daughters of mature age indiscriminately lie together . . . and all in the bare buff.'[3] The wall-bed was a wooden frame built into the outshot which has been described earlier. It had its own wooden covering or tester to give protection from roof drips, and originally, to judge by the Hebridean black-houses, the covering was of sods. In Donegal, bog timber supplied the bed frame, and the mattress was made of wattles or of ropes twisted from the root fibres of bog-fir. That fir-rope mattresses were once standard fittings is shown by the specification for the beds to be supplied to the Belfast Charitable Association in 1774.[4] But some of the wall-beds in parts of Connacht were until recently mere stone benches covered with dried bracken. Half-ruined examples may be seen in the deserted houses of Slievemore on Achill Island.

In the house with fireside partition the kitchen bed often takes the form of a settle-bed, a seat by day and a bed by night. The front and seat are in one piece, hinged at the bottom so that the whole can be folded down to make a low bed (Fig. 18). In bachelor homes, where the settle-bed has been retained, I have been offered a seat on one which had been closed a moment before by bundling in the mattress and bedclothes. Placed against one of the side walls near the fire, the settle-bed

[1] J. C. Walker, *Historical Memoirs of the Irish Bards*, 2nd ed. (1818), Appendix 1, 196–204.
[2] *The Saxon in Ireland* (1851), 192.
[3] Lord George Hill, *Gweedore*, 16.
[4] R. W. M. Strain, *The Ulster Medical Journal*, 22 (1953), 37.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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352 admirably illustrates the economy of space and function characteristic of Irish kitchen fittings, but I doubt whether this rather complicated piece of furniture is of any great antiquity: it was probably introduced by planters or adapted from a settle fitted with a coffer seat.

The black-houses, as described in the nineteenth century, had no table, and there are still to be seen, in Donegal for instance, houses where there is no kitchen table. At meal-times [264] the family sit around a shallow potato basket resting on the circle of knees. The origin of the tripod tray-table of south-eastern Europe and south-western Asia is surely to be sought in a similar custom. In fact the Blasket Island table was described as a tripod to which was fitted a board which hung on the wall when not in use.[1] The little round table is known from many parts of western Europe. There is, for example, the three-legged 'cricket' table of Wales, which has a special place in the affections of the family. Placed near the fire, it is reserved at meal-times for the father and mother while the children and servants eat at the big table. In Ireland the kitchen table is a flimsy construction, and its place is against the side wall, under a window. Not infrequently it is hinged to the wall as a 'falling leaf table' which drops when not in use, thus enlarging the open space in front of the fire.

Bishop Pococke describes the Tirawley (Mayo) table as 'a long sort of stool about 20 inches high and broad and two yards long',[2] clearly designed to be stowed away along a wall. Small tables which have been found in the bogs are little more than small boards, their four short legs being cut from the solid. They are provided with holes by which they could be transported or hung up when not in use (Fig. 26). It follows that table-chairs were unnecessary: long, low, narrow stools or three [516] legged 'creepies' would serve, and the children would have squatted eastern-fashion on the floor.

352 The table, therefore, in the words of a Swedish student of 592 Irish ethnology, 'never attracted the social activities of the house, and there are no ceremonies connected with the places at the table, as in countries where the table is the predominating

[1] T. O'Crohan, *The Islandman* (1934), 40.
[2] *Pococke's Tour, 1752* (1891), 87.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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social and family centre'.[1] The table has never supplanted the fireplace as the focus of social living, a function it has served since the dawn of humanity. As so often happens, folklore endorses this finding: there is an Irish saying that it is unlucky to shake hands across a table. The table or 'board', which in the English language gave its name to a committee, has not replaced the fireside as the place where the Irish countryman talks—and talks business. When food is left out for the fairies or for visitors from the other world it is placed in front of the fire, and at Hallowe'en seats for the returning dead were arranged around the fire.

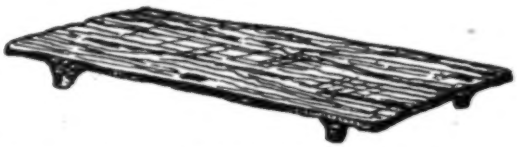

FIG. 26. Table, cut from the solid, from a Co. Armagh bog. It measures 20 in. by 12 in.

Similarly the fireside, not the table, attracted whatever means of illumination was available. The hob-lamp took the place of the table-lamp. Even when paraffin came in the oil lamp was still hung in the chimney. The older native oils, derived from fish and burnt in open lamps, were very unsavoury, and it was expedient to allow the fumes to escape with the chimney smoke. The iron crusie or open oil-lamp, its shape almost unchanged since classical times, was to be seen nearly everywhere around the coast until late in the last century (Fig. 27) but the paraffin lamp quickly swept it out of existence. Medieval crusies from Spain, Italy and north-western Europe are very similar to recent Irish examples, and it was from the Rhineland, it is said, that the crusie was taken to Pennsylvania, where it first succumbed to the new mineral oil. Stone moulds of uncertain age known from Scotland and Ireland show how the iron pans were hammered into shape. Inland, the place of the crusie was taken by resinous splinters of bog fir kept by the fire till tinder dry,

[1] Å. Campbell in *Folk-Liv* (1937), 234.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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church festivals and at wakes, and though they are now bought they are made by hand in a few towns by chandlers who carry on a medieval tradition. One Dublin firm, established in 1488, manufactures large church candles of beeswax by methods which can have changed little with the centuries. In the home the candles were supported in wrought-iron holders or stuck into a turf by the fireside. Tall standard holders, often with adjustable fittings, were designed to give light to the weaver at the loom, and they are most typically found in Ulster (Fig. 28). The fine embroidery which occupied the women in the linen districts must have imposed a great strain on the eyes: there are stories of a single candle serving as a central source of light for a ring of seamstresses, each of whom held her work against a bottle full of water which acted as a magnifier.

In Ireland, as throughout Atlantic Europe, the dresser ranks as the most important and elaborate piece of furniture in the kitchen, and its position is prescribed by custom. It stands either against the side wall or against the partition between kitchen and bedroom. Since this partition is of no great antiquity we can be sure that the original place of the dresser was against the side-wall and that it has developed from, and taken the place of, shelves built into or attached to the side-wall. In part of Ulster it is referred to as 'the shelf'. I have already mentioned the tiers of stone shelves set in the wall which are preserved in the deserted houses of the Slievemore cluster on Achill Island. It is believed that the fashion of open crockery shelves was diffused from the court sideboards of the later Middle Ages in France and England, and it may be surmised that the wooden dresser was readily accepted in Celtic lands to replace wall shelves, from Elizabethan times on. The adoption of delph and tea-drinking in the eighteenth century no doubt accelerated the spread of the dresser, which had become, by that time, an essential part of Irish kitchen furniture (Plate 1). The corner-cupboard, evolving in much the same way from corner-shelves, is another article of furniture with a north-west European distribution. Similarly the coffer or store-chest spread through western Europe from the later Middle Ages onwards, replacing skin, straw, hollowed wood, or basket-work containers.

 [Text continues on p. 93]

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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FURNITURE AND FITTINGS

Low stools and benches seem to have been the traditional form of seating, and no doubt the floor served for the children. Travellers noted that this was the best way to avoid the smoke: 352

> By sitting low, on rushes spread,
> The smoke still hover'd overhead;
> And did more good than real harm,
> Because it kept the long house warm.[1]

Fireside seats, more or less fixed, were often of stone, a solid block of wood or a large lump of turf. In the 'round about' hearths which were common in parts of Co. Antrim, and which people who remember them have described to me, the seat behind the fire, a log of wood, was known as the dais, a dialect word for a bench or seat which appears to be of north English origin. Solid seats of coiled straw or rushes were also common (Fig. 29) but the favourite fireside stool was the three-legged creepie, resembling a milking stool and like it finding a firm hold no matter how uneven the floor. There is little evidence of chairs of any antiquity. A three-legged type found in parts of the west, with a triangular seat and a narrow one-piece back has probably evolved from the creepie but looks Germanic. The nearest approach to a distinctive Irish style is the straw or rush-seated chair, which finds its best-known homes in Co. Down and Co. Limerick. High-backed armchairs made entirely of coiled straw rope after the manner of a beehive used to be found in the west, and since they can be paralleled in many parts of western Europe from the Orkneys to Spain it is probable that their manufacture is a peasant craft of some antiquity (Fig. 29). Cradles, too, were made of straw as well as of wood and basketwork, and they were sometimes suspended from the roof. I have heard of a cradle being improvised by laying a horse-collar on the floor. The phrase 'rocked in a pot' applied to an illegitimate child is said to derive from the use of a large fireside cooking pot as cradle and hiding place: round-shouldered infants were therefore suspect. [854] [848]

Down to recent times it was the custom to keep most of the dairying equipment in the kitchen, and in the traditional peasant house the upright churn still occupies a place against the wall, 234 353

[1] W(illiam) M(offatt), *The Western Isle* (1724), Canto 2.

[Text continues on p. 95]

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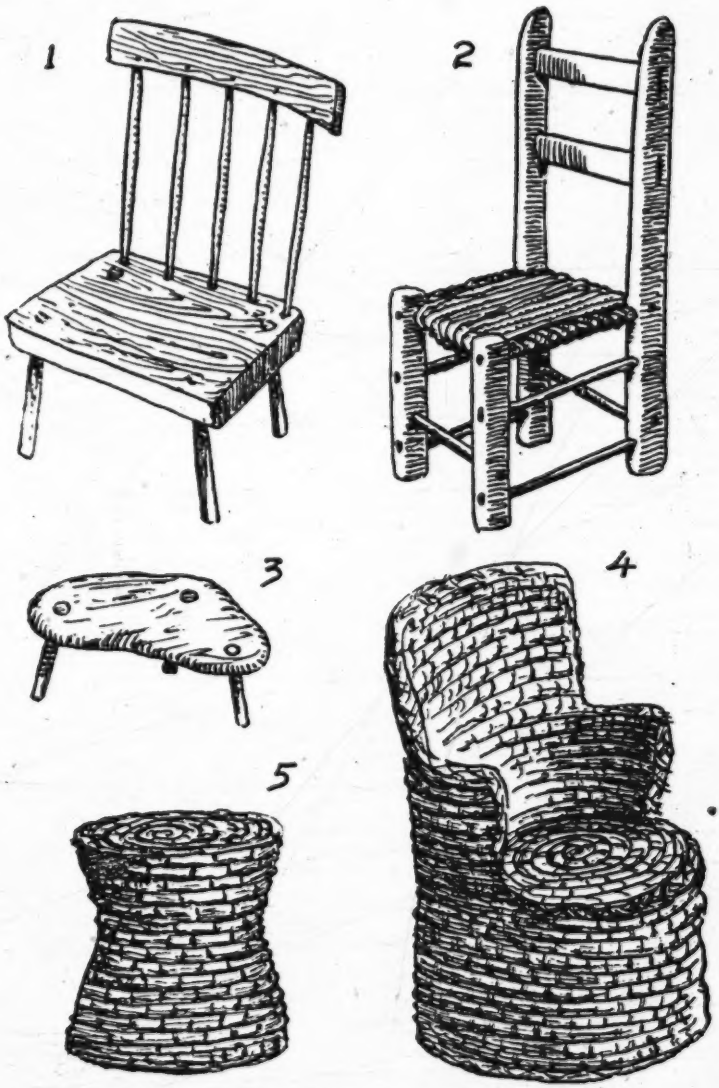

[285]

FIG. 29. (1) Co. Antrim chair. (2) Co. Down straw-seated chair. (3) Creepie. (4) Armchair of coiled straw-rope, Co. Cork. (5) Straw seat, Co. Clare.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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and a handful of thatch taken from above the door of his house. Butter-making must have been a chancy and critical business when each family had only one or two cows, ill-fed for a large part of the year, and there were fairies, witches and blinkers to contend with. The protective charms and prognostications connected with churning are legion. If you should enter an old-style mountain kitchen when churning is in progress you may well be invited to lend a hand, or at least to 'leave your weight on the staff,' just to show that your intentions are not evil. There must be no bad words during churning, no quarrels, no singing or drinking: to drink anything is presumably to dilute the milk. If the milk splashes the churner is fated to marry a drunken mate. When the butter at last breaks a small ball of it is traditionally taken and smeared on the wall or tossed on top of the dresser to bring luck to the house, perhaps originally as an offering to the fairies. And when the churning is finished the staff should be twisted round three times and placed across the mouth of the churn. There are many other precautions that may be taken: a horseshoe—preferably 'a shoe of one heating'—tied to the churn or nailed to the bottom; a nail from a horseshoe or from a coffin driven into churn or staff; a ring of salt placed on the lid; a twig of rowan tied round the churn. Or the plough coulter should be heated in the fire, and the churnstaff tied with a straw rope to the fire-crane: if the staff is made of rowan-wood so much the better. If despite all precautions the butter does not come there are ways of catching the thief. For instance, a cake is baked and stuck with pins and a bunch of yarrow placed in the churn. The thief will come crying to the door in pain, and he must not be allowed in but turned away.

Special precautions should also be taken to make the house safe at night from unwanted visitations. Before the fire is raked and 'smoored' (buried in peat-ash) a spark should be dropped into the foot-water, the water in which feet have been washed and to which many superstitions are attached. The carded flax should be placed under a weight, the band taken off the spinning wheel and the quern dismantled. Many stories are told of the risks involved in letting the fairies have access to these things. Finally the besom should be placed against the door: the

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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512 besom's association with everyday tasks and with the fireside
352 endows it with special power. Thrown after a departing match-
[777] maker or anyone going on an important errand, it brings luck to his mission.

771 For most people, needless to say, such things are now mean-
789 ingless superstitions—old pishrogues. True, one still hears
178 occasionally of cows being blinked, of a black cock buried alive as a cure for epilepsy, of a healthy woman pining away because a neighbour was sticking pins into a waxen image. These are stray survivals, doomed to disappear; but in a larger sense the past never wholly dies: it lives on buried in the minds of men and in the landscapes they have fashioned.

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag

582 621 593 three sisters, and ten of two—and they tend to visit together often and lend mutual economic and emotional support.

591 428 342 822 776 When a man marries, his parents relinquish the holding, and its direction passes into the hands of the newlyweds. Arensberg and Kimball talk of the "west room" complex, which may exist in many parts of peasant Ireland but does not in Inis Beag. Houses in north and west Co. Clare "with remarkable uniformity" are aligned east and west, and on the son's marriage the old couple moves into the westernmost room "behind the hearth." This room is linked with the Celtic supernatural, for fairy paths are thought to be located along the western side of many houses, and the pagan afterworld—the Isle of the Blest—is a sunken land mass in the nearby western sea (Arensberg and Kimball 1940:134–136). In Inis Beag, on the contrary, over one-third of the domiciles since 1841 have been aligned north and south, fairy trails are found mostly at the back of the island, and a retiring couple may choose any of three rooms (or more in modern homes) to move into. The west room of Co. Clare is called simply "the room" in Inis Beag.

342 [178] [177] [65] Thirty-four of the 71 inhabited buildings in the island have thatched roofs (see Fig. 8), while the others are antiquated houses which lately have been renovated, mainly by replacing thatch with slate, or are newly built. The last of the traditional "cabins" or "cottages" were constructed in the 1930s, and the first of the modern ones during the 1890s—with two stories initially, and styled and subsidized by the Congested Districts Board. Old and renovated houses are rectangular in shape, are constructed of whitewashed stones with concrete floors, and have a large central kitchen with doors or half-doors to the outside both front and back. "The room" is beyond the kitchen at one end of the building, and two bedrooms (one in the most ancient cabins) are at the other. Lofts for sleeping are in the gable of the roof above "the room" and bedrooms, and are entered by ladder [372] or staircase from the kitchen. Fireplaces share a common wall and chimney between the kitchen and "the room," as they also may between the two bedrooms; but the kitchen hearth is the most used, and in some homes is not permitted to die out.

351 [343] [244] The space between the cottage and the low stone wall and outbuildings surrounding it is called the "street." Outbuildings at the back include a toilet and various storage sheds—for spuds and turf sods in particular, although the latter often are stacked instead against a gable of the cabin. In a portion of the street or a small field beyond the wall, a garden for vegetables is maintained for easy access.

342 [262] [264] [415] [178] [362] The kitchen doors of the house sometimes open into small halls in the front or back, or both, and when the weather is not too cold or blustery, the door opening to the street on the windward side is kept closed and its opposite open. In the kitchen, which is the center of family activities, are: the fireplace at which cooking is done with pot and cooking ovens hung from an iron hook; the table around which the family eats their five daily meals; the sideboard, known as a "dresser," filled with "delph"—both everyday and "best" china; the religious shrine with "blessed lamp" surrounded by religious pictures and sacred objects; and, occasionally, a "settlebed" which, when closed, serves as a bench during the daytime.

354 [352] [514] [593] [178] The hearth in the kitchen is indented into the wall to provide two hobs, or seats, and on a chilly or dampish day the folk will nestle inside the fireplace and sit tightly together on a bench drawn up close to the turf fire for warmth. This

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag

rejuvenate the moribund tradition. However, several men past the age of 40 years still are able to perform jigs, reels, hornpipes, and hop-jigs with dexterity, "when the humor is on them," and are called out at parties and in the pubs; a few women will step dance in their homes or at small social gatherings.

There is considerable evidence to suggest that the rigid body and arms of the step dancer are an early nineteenth century product of Jansenist doctrine in the church, which attempted to desexualize dancing. Most of the movement is below the hips of the dancer, and it is the feet of the performer which are watched intently by the audience, at least openly. Inis Beag men move their upper bodies and arms more than is customary on the mainland, and they are not as graceful as other Irish dancers.

Figure dancing is called "set" dancing in Ireland, and there are many such dances, each of which combines a number of simple and complex figures performed by the couples. There is only one set in Inis Beag; it bears no name and is danced by one or more groups of four couples each. The many figures of the dance are simple, and it takes about 20 minutes to complete. I have heard young dancers complain at the end of a night of the tediousness of the single set, and some of them are learning other Irish figures at language school dances—"The Walls of Limerick" and "The Bridge of Athlone," among others. The most enjoyed movement of the local set is the one at the end in which the man holds his partner closely and twirls her almost violently, sometimes for longer than is prescribed so that the musician must pause or alter his rhythm. With bodily contact between partners otherwise so limited, perhaps this figure allows the expression of repressed sexuality.

Parties

It is appropriate to describe the Inis Beag party and a festive night at the pub in this chapter, because they are esthetic as well as social events, in which are combined storytelling, music, song, and dance. Parties are very much the same, whether held in the winter or the summer or to welcome home a long departed emigrant or to "drag home" a new bride. Only two rooms of the house are utilized —the kitchen and "the room" adjoining it—and benches are placed along the walls to supplement the chairs and bed on which guests will sit. The barrel or two of stout to be served is placed in the back hall off the kitchen, if there is such a hall, or in a back corner of the kitchen, and one man is assigned the task of dispensing the drink and remaining at his post throughout the night. Another man acts as "pourer" and fills a bucket from which he pours the stout into several mugs and glasses which are circulated from man to man. A bottle of whiskey is opened and proffered only to the old men, who often sit in a group beside the fireplace and exchange anecdotes and tales. On a table in "the room" are placed bottles of wine and soft drinks to accommodate the women and non-drinkers among the men before and after refreshments are served. Sometimes an elderly woman will drink surreptitiously of the whiskey or stout, and it is customary for the musicians and those who sing and step dance the most to be awarded extra amounts of stout. Women